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Casey farmers trying to keep tobacco funds from exposition center

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LIBERTY - Two Casey County cattle producers are circulating a petition to keep the county's Phase I Tobacco Settlement Funds available to farmers and away from the county's new exposition center.

Frank McAninch and James Young want other farmers to go on record by signing the petition.

Currently, over \$300,000 a year goes to farmers under cost-share programs set up by the state board to increase net farm income. This is in accord with state House Bill 611, which makes a portion of the state's total tobacco settlement funds available to individual counties.

The petition asks that Casey County's portion of funds not be used at the Central Kentucky Ag Expo Center nor on any other type of entertainment facility.

McAninch, a full-time farmer and past chairman of the county ag council, and Young, a cattle producer, have helped in development of the document and have been active in administering cost-share programs using tobacco settlement funds since mid-2001.

"The petition is a way for people to speak out on this important matter of fiscal policy, and hopefully it will cause a favorable outcome for farmers in the county," McAninch said.

U.S. Sen. Mitch McConnell's office has announced that \$1 million in federal funds have been approved for the Ag Expo Center, according to McAninch.

"You would think that a million dollars should be enough to provide the county adequate facilities at the Expo site," McAninch said.

"Certain members of the present county ag council seem dedicated to taking the county's tobacco settlement funds away from farmers, and they were placed on the council for that purpose."

McAninch added that "if farmers are deprived of the county's tobacco settlement funds, they lose out on financial assistance for farm improvement that increase income."

Objection is with how funds are used

Both farmers say they are not opposed to a reasonable fairgrounds and recreational park for the county, but each say tobacco settlement funds should not be used for that purpose.

"Spending the county's share of tobacco settlement funds on the Expo Center is grossly unfair to farmers, and makes them bear the cost burden for the facility rather than the county as a whole," said Young.

"Farmers have been waiting to participate in the cattle handling facilities cost-share program for over

two years, and the other cost-share programs allowed by the state Ag Development Board for farmers have not been started because the county's tobacco settlement funds are already insufficient to meet demand," Young added.

The petition which will be presented to the state Agricultural Development Board and county Agricultural Development Council, asks people to sign that they "support the use of Casey funds for model programs like cattle handling, diversification programs, forage improvement, fencing improvement, hay and grain storage facilities, livestock genetic improvement, and other programs having the purpose of increasing net farm income. Such programs provide cost share payments directly to farmers in the proper use of funds allocated to the county."

The petition also asks people to sign if they "do not support the use of the funds on facilities at the Central Kentucky Agriculture Expo Center, fairgrounds, an arena, recreational park or any other entertainment facility. Any funds to be expended on these facilities should come from other sources and not take the funds away from programs that assist farmers for productive agricultural activities."

"The support for the petition has been very positive," said McAninch, after the document had been circulated a few days. "I believe we will have a large number of signatures by the time the petition has been circulated for a couple of weeks. Our whole intent is to help the farmers."

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